



## **Crisis Media Information and Interview Tips**

With an unfolding crisis, you must use the media to get your messages out because you do not have time to meet with every stakeholder. Every interview with a reporter is an opportunity to convey key messages and factual information to the viewing audience. The types of interviews you may be asked to participate in will vary depending upon the circumstances. Common interview types include the following:

- On-site interviews: normally conducted by a reporter and camera operator. This interview method is preferred during the early stages of a crisis or other emergency.
- Press or news conferences: normally conducted in a classroom-style setting with speakers delivering information from a lectern to an audience of reporters. This interview type is preferred for conveying large amounts of information and responding to multiple questions. Press conferences may be conducted on scene or in a dedicated briefing facility.
- In-studio interviews: normally conducted by a reporter in a fully equipped sound studio. This interview method is preferred for conducting more in-depth interviews and may be used by reporters as a crisis situation winds down.

During crisis media interviews, success is measured by the ability to convey messages that demonstrate commitment to public health and safety as well as empathy/concern for those impacted by the crisis situation. The following the tips will assist you.

- Before the interview:
  - Coordinate with the local public affairs office for guidance.
  - Know the reporter and publication/program.
  - Negotiate the basics of the interview such as location, duration, format, and the general categories of questions to be asked by the reporter.
  - Develop or refine key messages to deliver during the interview. You may have several or only one message based on the stage of the crisis.
  - Understand the basics of message discipline including how to respond to difficult questions from reporters and techniques for bridging to key messages.
  - Know the Army “position” on the issue so you can speak with “one voice.”
  - Prepare for questions, including the “tough” questions.
  - Be sensitive to the reporter’s deadlines.
  - Remember nothing is “off the record.”
- During the interview:
  - Show empathy and concern for people affected by the situation.
  - Be message-oriented, not question-oriented.
  - Direct the interview and answer the questions with which you’re comfortable.
  - Bridge to your messages early and often.



- Speak in “headlines.” Give summaries – briefly and directly. Back with supporting facts. Short answers are better than long. Avoid military acronyms and technical jargon.
- Answer negative or false accusations/allegations with a positive statement. Avoid repeating the negative.
- Use the guide for Planning and Preparing for Difficult Questions and Statements (in the following pages) to package your responses.
- Stay positive, never defensive. Asked about a problem? Talk about a solution.
- Remain relaxed, cordial, and focused. Talk through the reporter to the public. Never let them see you sweat or be provoked on camera.
- Do not get chummy with reporters – their job is to report the news; your job is to deliver your messages.
- Avoid answering speculative questions or hypotheticals – stay focused on the facts.
- During the early stages of a terrorism incident, focus on WHAT, WHEN, and WHERE – avoid responding to WHO, WHY, and HOW until investigations are complete, you are sure of the information, and you have clearance to give that information. If you are dealing with a natural disaster incident, provide all information you have clearance to give. Avoid criticizing or commenting on the response of other government agencies.
- If you make a mistake or misspeak on a previous response, acknowledge the reporter’s current question but take the opportunity prior to responding to correct or clarify a previous statement. For example, “Before responding to your question, I want to clarify a statement I made earlier during the interview. . .”
- Don’t know the answer? There is nothing wrong with “I don’t know” or “That’s not my area of expertise, please speak with X about that.” Questions on defense policy can be answered the same way.
- After the interview:
  - Keep your “interview attitude” until the interview is over and the reporter is gone. Assume the microphone and cameras are always on.
  - Ask the reporter when he or she expects the interview to be aired.
  - Ensure you exchange contact information with the reporter in case follow-up is required.
  - Debrief your chain of command as well as the local PAO and Incident Commander.
  - If the interview contains factual errors or misrepresentations, contact the reporter and/or editor to provide the correct information. In some instances, it may be beneficial to ask for an on-air correction.
- Bottom Line:
  - Always tell the truth.
  - A media interview is a “fire and forget” mission. Do the best you can and then let it go.
  - Communication is a skill ... Practice!